

VZCZCXRO3882
PP RUEHMA RUEHPA
DE RUEHAR #0154/01 0291248
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 291248Z JAN 08
FM AMEMBASSY ACCRA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6069
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RUEHC/DEPT OF LABOR WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 ACCRA 000154

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DEPT FOR AF/W AND H

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [OVIP](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ELAB](#) [GH](#)

SUBJECT: CODEL ENGEL'S VISIT TO GHANA

¶1. SUMMARY - During a January 9 - 11 visit to Ghana, CODEL Engel pressed Ghanaian officials, NGOs and industry for further efforts against the worst forms of child labor in the cocoa sector in accordance with the 2001 Harkin-Engel Protocol. The GOG outlined steps it has taken to survey child labor practices in Ghana's cocoa-growing regions, and efforts to implement the GOG's national plan of action to eliminate the worst forms of child labor (WFCL). The CODEL also visited a cocoa village in Ghana's Western Region, viewing International Cocoa Initiative (ICI) projects to combat child labor, and a program to help farmers improve their farming practices. The delegation also met with local NGOs that serve as implementing partners for ICI. END SUMMARY.

Ghana Officials Outline Efforts to Combat Child Labor

¶2. On January 10, CODEL Engel, comprising Representative Eliot Engel (NY), Senator Thomas Harkin (IA) and Senator Bernard Sanders (VT), accompanied by Ambassador Bridgewater, met with Minister of Manpower, Youth and Employment (MMYE) Honorable Nana Akomea, Minister of Finance and Economic Planning Kwadwo Baah Wiredu, Minister of National Security Francis Poku, Minister of Lands, Forestry and Mines Esther Obeng-Dapaah, Minister of Local Government, Rural Development and Environment Adjei-Darko, Minister of State for Education Elizabeth Ohene, Deputy Minister of MMYE Akosua Frema Osei-Opere, Deputy Chief Executive of the Ghana Cocoa Board (COCOBOD) Charles Ntim, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr. Brimpong-Yeboah, Deputy Chief Executive of COCOBOD Tony Fofie and other GoG officials to discuss efforts to eliminate of the worst forms of child labor (WFCL) from the cocoa sector and to assess Ghana's efforts towards this goal.

Opening Remarks

¶3. After introductions, Representative Engel reviewed the Harkin-Engel Protocol and efforts to develop industry-wide standards, and to have a certification system that will report and monitor the worst forms of child labor in the cocoa sector. He noted that as the world's leading consumer of cocoa, the United States is a logical partner to "eliminate the vestiges of child slave labor." The delegation said it wanted a partnership with the GOG, emphasizing that children should have access to education and not be forced to labor and miss school.

¶4. Regarding the Harkin-Engel Protocol, Representative Engel said that the July 2008 deadline is to survey 50% of cocoa-growing regions; it was not the case that 50% of production had to be certified free of child labor by that deadline as some believe. He said results of completed surveys indicate that children are doing heavy and sometimes dangerous work.

¶5. Senator Harkin said he was discouraged by the missed deadline of July 1, 2005. He acknowledged that the civil war in Ivory Coast had hindered progress there and that compliance is a long-term process.

¶6. Senator Sanders echoed his colleagues' remarks, and noted the substantial profits that companies such as Mars, Hershey, Kraft, ADM, and Cargill enjoyed while children toil and miss school. He called for a collaborative effort on behalf of the GoG, the USG and industry to eliminate WFCL.

Ghana Outlines Measures Against Child Labor

¶7. Minister of National Security Poku replied that efforts to eliminate WFCL fit with the mission of national security. He said there were "officers all around the country monitoring abuses of international conventions," and that he was pleased WFCL issues were being addressed by GOG ministries in coordination with NGOs. He said there had been a radical change in attitude in Ghana towards education, emphasizing that many students are now interested in pursuing masters degrees and other forms of higher education. (NOTE: Poku was fired from his ministerial position on January 12. END NOTE)

¶8. Deputy Minister of Manpower, Youth and Employment Akosua Frema Osei-Opare, who leads the GoG's effort to combat child labor, asserted that much of Ghana's child labor problem was a result of communal farming practice in the country. She stressed that Ghana cares for its children and there was no ill intent in having children performing hazardous work. She said that the government had put panels in place to focus on the needs of children, and in many communities, school teachers, priests, queen mothers and other community pillars have joined together to look after the welfare and interests of children.

¶9. In her presentation, Deputy Minister Frema described steps the GOG has taken, including establishing a legislative framework, a national policy framework, and specific programs designed for

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"effective child development." However, Frema said that the GOG was challenged by its limited national resources. In concluding, Frema emphasized the GOG's displeasure with the Tulane University oversight study, which she described as "policing" its work.

¶10. Rita Owusu-Amankwah, National Program Manager for the National Programme for the Elimination of Worst Forms of Child Labour in Cocoa (NPECLC), further detailed GoG efforts to eliminate WFCL in cocoa by 2011. Owusu-Amankwah explained that the GOG had crafted a multi-sectoral approach to solve the problem and designating "a high-level official from the GOG to direct and serve as government's point person." She outlined progress made towards documenting and remediating the WFCL. With the cooperative effort from partners like the World Cocoa Foundation, UNICEF, the Danish Embassy and the International Cocoa Initiative, the GOG has developed occupational safety and health measures to reduce the WFCL.

¶11. Following the GOG presentations, Representative Engel and Senator Harkin stressed that transparency and verification were essential, and that data collected for measuring WFCL should be available to all parties.

Survey of Cocoa Farms for WFCL

¶12. The COCOBOD representative said their report would be finished in April 2008, that data had been entered, and that analysis and report writing would begin soon. The six districts covered in the pilot survey would be covered in the second survey, which is to include a total of 15 districts. The area surveyed, he noted, represents sixty percent of Ghana's output of cocoa. In response to Senator Harkin's question when 100% completion would be achieved, the COCOBOD representative replied that this may be completed in the next year.

¶13. COCOBOD also noted that limited funding has impeded its ability to meet deadlines. Senator Harkin replied that industry was contributing "almost nothing" to the elimination of WFCL and that he would work with his Congressional colleagues to push for more funding from industry. He observed that ADM had contributed

US\$150,000, and the total from the industry was "about US\$2 million." The CODEL members asked the GOG to outline what resources would be necessary to meet their obligations.

¶14. Concerning the percent of farms covered by the survey, Senator Harkin clarified that he was not referring to 100 percent of farms being surveyed, but rather 100 percent of growing areas. He noted that some areas may have more problems than others.

¶15. Deputy Minister Frema explained that the area covered was "mainly" guided by the Protocol. There are six growing areas in Ghana, and they had all been covered. The 60 percent figure they gave before was referring to cocoa output by the government in 15 districts. They had covered 100 percent of the six cocoa growing areas.

Education

¶16. Representative Engel asked if it was as difficult for students to gain access to schools in Ghana as in the Ivory Coast, particularly due to the schools' distance. The Minister of State for Education explained that the problem in Ghana was not as serious because cocoa production in Ghana takes place mainly on small farms, whereas in Ivory Coast cocoa tends to be grown on plantations. In Ghana, she continued, the problem was more acute in pastoral areas where children tend cows and sheep. She explained that it was difficult to get "these children to school at 7:30 am, so "shepherd boy schools" have been created. She observed that a bigger challenge for Ghana relates to fishing communities because authorities have not found a way to develop suitable schools those communities.

¶17. In response to Representative Engel's question regarding the percentage of children in school, the Ministry of State responded that current law requires children to begin school by age six, but that the age will soon be lowered to apply to four year olds. For Primary One level students, enrollment is 91 percent nationally, but it varies by region from 71 to 100 percent enrollment. The head of research at COCOBOD said cocoa growing areas had a higher enrollment than other areas.

¶18. Representative Engel concluded by emphasizing he would push industry for more assistance. He stated he felt that the meeting helped make progress. Ambassador Bridgewater thanked all in attendance and said the U.S. Mission stood ready to ensure the success of the Congressional delegation's efforts.

Visit to Cocoa Village in Western Region

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¶19. Following the meeting with GOG officials, the CODEL traveled to the village of Sekyere Krobo in the Western Region, where the International Cocoa Initiative (ICI) carries out projects addressing child labor in cocoa farming. ICI coordinates these projects with Kumasi-based NGO Participatory Development Associates (PDA), and various local NGOs including Support for Community Mobilization Project/Programme (SCMPP) and Help Advance Communities Opportunity Goals (HACOG). Representatives of the cocoa industry and local NGOs were present throughout this portion of the trip.

¶20. At a cocoa farm outside of Sekyere Krobo, local farmers explained and demonstrated the stages of cocoa farming and processing. At the ICI-sponsored "farmer field school," participants shared their experiences and knowledge on new practices that have made their farms more productive and reduced the need for child labor.

¶21. Following the farm visit, over 200 inhabitants of Sekyere Krobo welcomed the CODEL in their village center. Senator Harkin, Senator Sanders, and Representative Engel each addressed community members, explaining the purpose of their visit and their interest in helping combat child labor in cocoa. Community children put on drama sketches designed to sensitize people against child labor.

Villagers spoke about the impact of ICI projects and the experiences of women and children in combating child labor. Community elders and the CODEL exchanged gifts, and the CODEL donating soccer balls for local children. Senator Harkin explained to the village leaders that the soccer balls from Nike that he gave them used to be made by children. But because of a similar effort to eradicate child labor from the industry, children were no longer involved in the sewing of soccer balls. The visit to Sekyere Krobo ended with a walking tour of ICI-funded projects, including schools and libraries that recently have obtained electricity, permitting children to go to school in the evenings.

¶22. The CODEL hosted a dinner in Elmina on January 10th. Attending were local NGO representatives, district level officials, representatives from the Ministry of Manpower, Youth and Employment, and Ghana Education Services. There were frank discussions on a range of issues. Ghanaian guests shared their views on Ghana family structures and their personal commitment to combating child labor. On January 11, the CODEL concluded its visit to Elmina with a tour of the Elmina Castle, learning about the centuries-old history of slavery in Ghana.

¶23. CODEL Engel has cleared this message.